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SOURCE Przegląd Komunikacyjny, No 12, 1949.MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS OF COAL TRUNKLINE IN SLASK

Zbigniew Nowakowski

The Katowice region has the heaviest railroad freight traffic in Poland. The so-called coal trunkline runs between Herby Nowe and Gdynia and connects the Slask coal fields and metallurgical plants in Katowice, Bytom, and Gliwice with the port of Gdynia. This trunkline has special problems, independent of the heavy traffic, in the maintenance of its roadbed, superstructure, bridges, and buildings not encountered elsewhere.

One of the most serious difficulties results from the settling of tracks because of mining in the area. Considerable areas of Upper Slask are undermined through the removal of coal or ores. Mine galleries, usually abandoned, often extend beneath the main centers of cities and beneath transportation lines. During the occupation, the Germans neglected to fill in the worked seams and this resulted in the caving in of tracks and roadbeds, especially during 1945 - 1948.

Sometimes a uniform settling of both roadbed and superstructure takes place over a large area. At other times fissures appear suddenly. Constant vigilance on the part of maintenance crews to eliminate or mitigate the damage so far has prevented serious accidents.

Tracks and roadbeds which have settled sometimes need to be raised a meter or more and filled in with slag or other material. First the gaps must be filled in because rail joints are knocked out of place. The roadbed surface must be replaced. Often the ditches become filled up and prevent proper drainage. Bridges present the most serious problem. When settling is uneven, they crack or show considerable caving in. Bridges of latest construction have foundations of reinforced concrete slabs, with abutments that are thick enough to allow for settling up to 2 meters.

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Under these conditions there are frequent cases where escarpment are shifted, tracks twisted, rails loosened, curves deformed, and tracks have settled on one side. Sometimes hundreds of carloads of building materials must be transported for the repair of damage due to settling, usually during peak traffic periods.

At present, settling in mine areas occurs less frequently since most galleries are now being filled in with sand driven in under water pressure after the coal is removed. Usually settling takes place over narrow stretches and is recurrent over a period of years at widely varying intervals. For example, in some instances the track settles daily and must be raised and reinforced daily for a period of two weeks. In such cases maintenance is extremely difficult. Side embankments disappear; the surface of the roadbed constantly changes, and milestones are lost.

Another maintenance problem in the area arises from the fact that coal dust drops from the coal cars and mingles with the gravel surface of the roadbed. Rain causes it to form a hardened mass with the gravel, which prevents drainage. Under the pressure of moving trains it disintegrates and forms ruts.

Railroad structures are also difficult to maintain in Gorny Slask, not only because of settling but also due to the presence of different kinds of smoke and fumes. All building in the area should be built with tie beams because walls frequently crack and sometimes cave in.

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